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ABSTRACT

This document describes some basic characteristics of decision-making that any formal management system should support: (1) the structure of an organization, (2) the decision patterns of an organization, and (3) the keys to good decisions. (Author)

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USE OF FORMAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS TO ASSIST DECISION MAKING IN SCHOOL SETTINGS

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A. Introduction

Everyone makes decisions all the time. We make decisions at home, on the job, walking down the street. All these decisions are important to us and we make most of them thoughtfully and with concern.

One could wonder then why talk about how Formal Management Systems help decision making. Why do we need to complicate things? Formal Management Systems apply to decisions we make on the job and those are already complicated enough. When we decide something on the job we have:

(a) more people involved in the decision and affected by the decision;

(b) more rules to follow set up by all kinds of people (many who are not involved in the decision);

(c) more money, power, status involved.

Our experience has taught us how to negotiate agreement, how to get consensus, how to keep things on an even keel. So why use Formal Management Systems?

Formal Management Systems are ways of organizing the pieces we put together to make a decision in a systematic way. A formal management system gives us tools to track ideas, processes, information, expected effects, and results. And these tools make the patterns and information used for decisions available publicly to all.

Formal Management Systems are only helpful if they organize things for us so that more efficient, consistent, reasonable, and targeted decisions can be made at the right time by the right people. And those are the criteria one should examine a particular formal management system with.

(a) What information will we get? What will the systems tell us about: money, people, programs, objectives, plans?

(b) Who will have the information? Who will provide or produce the information, and using what steps?

(c) Will we get consistent, accurate, and useful information on time?

The following pages describe some basic characteristics of decision making which any formal management system should support: (a) the structure of an organization, (b) the decision patterns of an organization, and (c) the keys to good decisions. In another sense, these are the criteria for decisions about formal management systems by an organization if these are phrased as follows:

HOW WILL THIS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

(A) MAKE THE STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION INTERRELATE MORE EFFICIENTLY AND APPROPRIATELY?

(B) MAKE THE DECISION PATTERNS MORE EFFICIENT AND MORE RESPONSIVE TO ORGANIZATION GOALS?

(C) PUT CONTROLS AND LIMITS ON THE KEY VARIABLES - LAWS, MONEY, TIME, PEOPLE, PROGRAMS, WE HAVE TO CONTEND WITH?

B. The Structures of an Organization

On the job, a person makes decisions alone and with others. While making decisions with others tends to take more time and seems more complicated, some decisions made alone are the most complicated and time consuming. What a formal management system does is to provide everyone with a known public set of information which serves as the basis for any decision. What may not be clear though are the levels and structures of the organization itself, how roles and authority are officially allocated.

Organizations, and in particular schools, have some basic levels

- Board level
- Central office level
- School level
- Classroom level
- Community level

Some decisions are made at a particular level. Some flow from one to another. What a formal management system does is organize the information that moves along from level to level.

Sometimes schools create committees or task forces to work on a problem that needs resolution. Often such groups are made up of people from the different levels of the organization; other times, the groups represent only specific constituencies rather than levels. In either event, these committees are usually ways to get a decision put together to be made later by someone, usually the central office or the Board. What a formal management system does is to provide a public process and consistent information for the committee. The decision itself, usually in the form

of a recommendation, remains the committee's; all the formal management system does is organize the steps to get to a decision and the information that is the basis for a decision.

When an individual, a level, or a committee faces a decision, certain steps should be taken in addition to utilizing the pattern and information drawn from the formal management system. In terms of organization, it is important to determine:

(a) Who makes the final official decision on this? What level in the organization is this? What levels does the decision have to go through to get there?

(b) What information exists that will influence the decision? What laws, policies, regulations, memoranda exist? What does the formal management system provide? What does the informal network say?

(c) What outside power sources need to be considered? How?

(d) How does the decision relate to the Goals or Purposes of the Organization?

One reason for putting people, titles, and information in an organized chart or list is to reduce the clutter and confusion that surround any decision in an organization. Another reason is to determine where the decision fits in the organization and to reduce the amount of energy invested in decision making by allocating decisions to the appropriate level or structure. A formal management system helps do this, by predetermining the pattern, the kinds of information to be provided the different identified decision makers.

A formal system and an identification of levels and structure of the school as an organization show everyone the <u>what</u> (areas for decisions) and the <u>how</u> (procedures for deciding) as distinct from the information that is the basis for decisions

and the normal procedures for collecting and organizing this basic information.

What an organization's Goal or Purpose, Budget, Plans, Staff, Programs, Schedules and Results are are not decisions but the bases for decisions. A formal management system organizes these bases for decisions; it does not decide. People decide, people at different levels and with different jobs in the schools.

C. Decision Making Patterns of an Organization

Most of our ideas about decision making are based in our experience. How we or the organization has made decisions. This experience is the basis for establishing some patterns for decision making. Generally, decision making patterns we use have the following parts.

(a) Some criteria for the decision are established
(b) Some steps to reach a decision are agreed to
(c) Some kinds of acceptable basis for the decision are agreed to
(d) Some other factors influencing a decision are discussed
(e) A decision is made

When we have to make a decision, we usually decide which of the following characteristics we hope our decision will have.

TABLE 1

Decision Making is			
1 - logical	———	intuitive	- 1
2 - formal	———	informal	- 2
3 - constand	———	responsive	- 3
4 - control	———	adapt	- 4
5 - arbitrary	———	democratic	- 5
6 - individual	———	group	- 6
7 - closed	———	open	- 7
8 - legal	———	developmental	- 8
9 - rigid	———	flexible	- 9
10 - easy	———	hard	- 10
11 - top	———	bottom	- 11
12 - clear	———	murky	- 12
13 - scientific	———	humane	- 13

One can use this chart as a checklist for the kinds of decisions made by an individual or group.

Formal management systems are designed to make decision more - logical, formal, constant, control, clear, scientific. Many times decisions really don't come out that way, but that is the intention of those who put together and use formal management systems.

A most important characteristic of decision patterns is that decisions result from a judgment about interconnected effects. Formal management system establish what the known limits of the interconnected components are. A decision then can more easily occur within the time period available for decisions. Decisions also occur:

(a) when one has the opportunity to make decisions

(b) with some information available and some level of mastery of decision making as a process

(c) when an individual or group requests action

(d) within a range of dollars available and dollars needed

(e) in an organization which is effected by who is in it, by goals, by its pattern of operations, and by its control mechanism.

The pattern for decision making can be very confusing particularly since individuals or groups go back and forth over certain steps and even skip some sets. A complete pattern looks something like the following and should be used to sort out the components of a specific decision by an individual or a group.

TABLE 2

Stages of Decision Making

Pattern A

1. Discover the Issue

   . identify Issue
   . identify source (cause of) Issue
   . identify how the Issue might be taken care of

2. Decide to do something

   . agree on the intent to remove (reduce) Issue
   . identify information needed
   . select process to collect information

3. Figure out what one might do

   . analyze the Issue
   . analyze the information
   . analyze the environment and the system the solution is caught up in

4. Find out what it makes sense to decide

   . get the information together
   . invent possible actions
   . agree on action to reach solution
   . agree on roles and responsibilities
   . agree on standards and expectations

5. Decide

   . start the ball rolling
   . keep the ball alive
   . share the ball with others
   . keep track of what was, is, and will be
   . keep track of what questions were asked, answers and promises made, and what was delivered
   . write down the decision

6. Know that something has changed

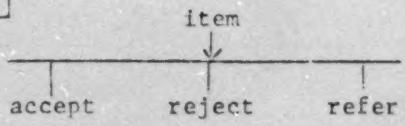
   . report what was decided
   . report what the basis for decision was
   . follow up an effect of the decision

TABLE 3

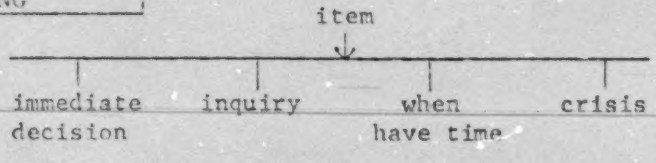
Basic Decision Making Steps

Pattern B

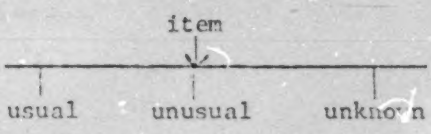
A. APPROPRIATENESS

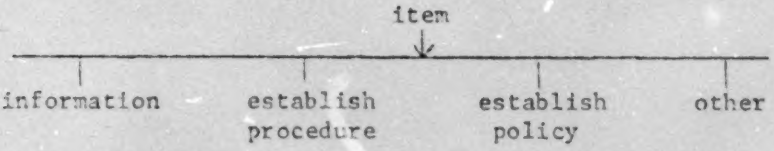


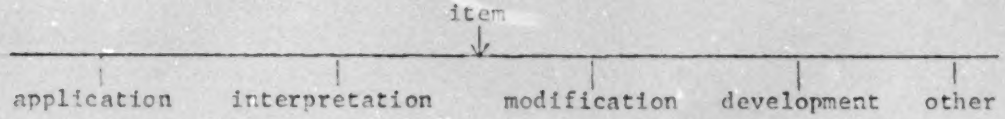
B. TIMING



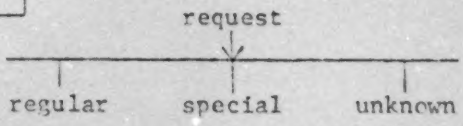
C. Kind of Response Needed







D. Routing of Request



E. Probably Impact of request

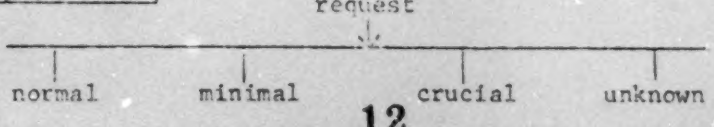
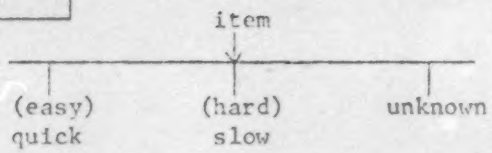
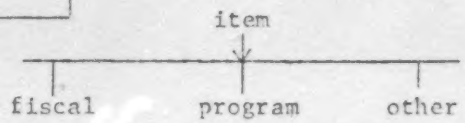


TABLE 3 (continued)

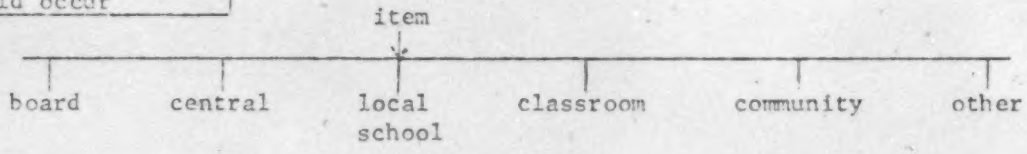
F. Expected time needed to make decision



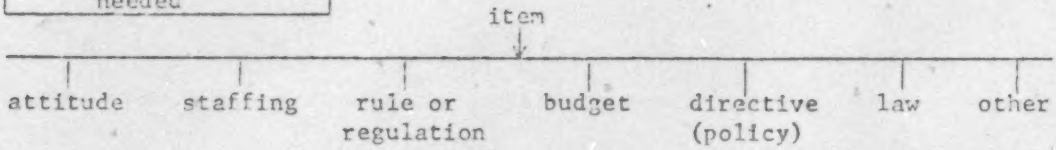
G. Type of request



H. Level where decision should occur



I. Kind of change needed



D. Keys to Good Decisions

When we have looked at decision making, we find the answers to the following questions crucial in making a useful decision.

TABLE 4

Checklist for Identifying Decision Points?
1. Where in the organization are decisions made?
2. Who makes what kinds of decisions? Is it one individual or a group? NAME, ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER?
3. What kind of information are decisions based on?
4. What problems or kinds of decisions are passed on to someone else? in the organization? somewhere else?
5. Does professional or technical information convince the decision maker(s)? in what ways?
6. How are decisions made? How long does it take? How will you know the decision has been made?
7. Does a decision once made get communicated to those who must implement it? If not, where does it get stuck?

What decision patterns do is to help keep track of where one is at in making a decision, then one can get useful information to others who also have to decide or to help you decide. Formal management systems assure that information about components of the organization are publicly available, in a consistent and predictable way to all during normal everyday operations as well as when they have to make decisions.

All this means that to make good decisions, one needs a system that enhances one's skills:

1. in identifying the players in the game
   a. levels or authority
   b. roles
   c. functions
   d. areas of responsibility
   e. kinds of decisions made
   f. amount of power, dollars, control available
   g. name, address, phone number of actors

2. in identifying how the players make decisions
   a. roles played
   b. style of decisions
   c. personality characteristics
   d. factors which influence
   e. areas of interest and control

3. in identifying if, when, how a decision is actually made
   a. deciding and knowing decision has been made
   b. keeping track of decision
   c. making decision public
   d. reporting on effect of decision

The most useful Formal Management System is one that complements the style and interests of the key decision makers in the school system. What they want documented information about - money, people, programs, objectives, plans - determines which system one should consider adopting.

TABLE 5

Finds Information Controlled by Various Formal Management Systems

A.	information about	what way a group works and plans	OD
B.	information about	funds targeted to programs	PPBS
C.	information about	persons performance of job expectation	PAS
D.	information about	relation of programs and outcomes to mission	MBO
E.	information about	all components and parts of the organization	System Analysis
F.	information about	time schedules to do things	PERT
G.	information about	actual money a program can justify anew each year	Zero Base Budgeting
H.	information about	what is happening in the organization	Organizational Research